

CHAPTER 3

BUTLER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

A new Executive Director of the Butler County Child and Youth Agency, in Butler County, Pennsylvania, recognized the need for programmatic and staffing changes within the organization. Agency morale was low and service delivery was not what it should have been. The executive director instituted a number of organizational and practice changes within the agency that impacted the CPS functions of the organization.

OVERVIEW OF CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES (CPS)

CPS in Pennsylvania is focused only on serious cases of child neglect. Less serious cases are handled by the income assistance agency under the general protective services (GPS).

Under the reform of CPS, the director created a separate intake function to address problems of calls being assigned inappropriately. The position was placed under the Special Services Unit, rather than under CPS, to give the Intake staff a degree of autonomy when referring cases. Calls are referred to the supervisor of the Special Services Unit who assigns the cases for investigation. Workers viewed the creation of a dedicated intake worker as a positive change for the agency. Supervisors and workers feel there is an increased consistency with intakes—which allows investigators time to focus and follow through with investigations—and results in a positive service to the community.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CPS AGENCY

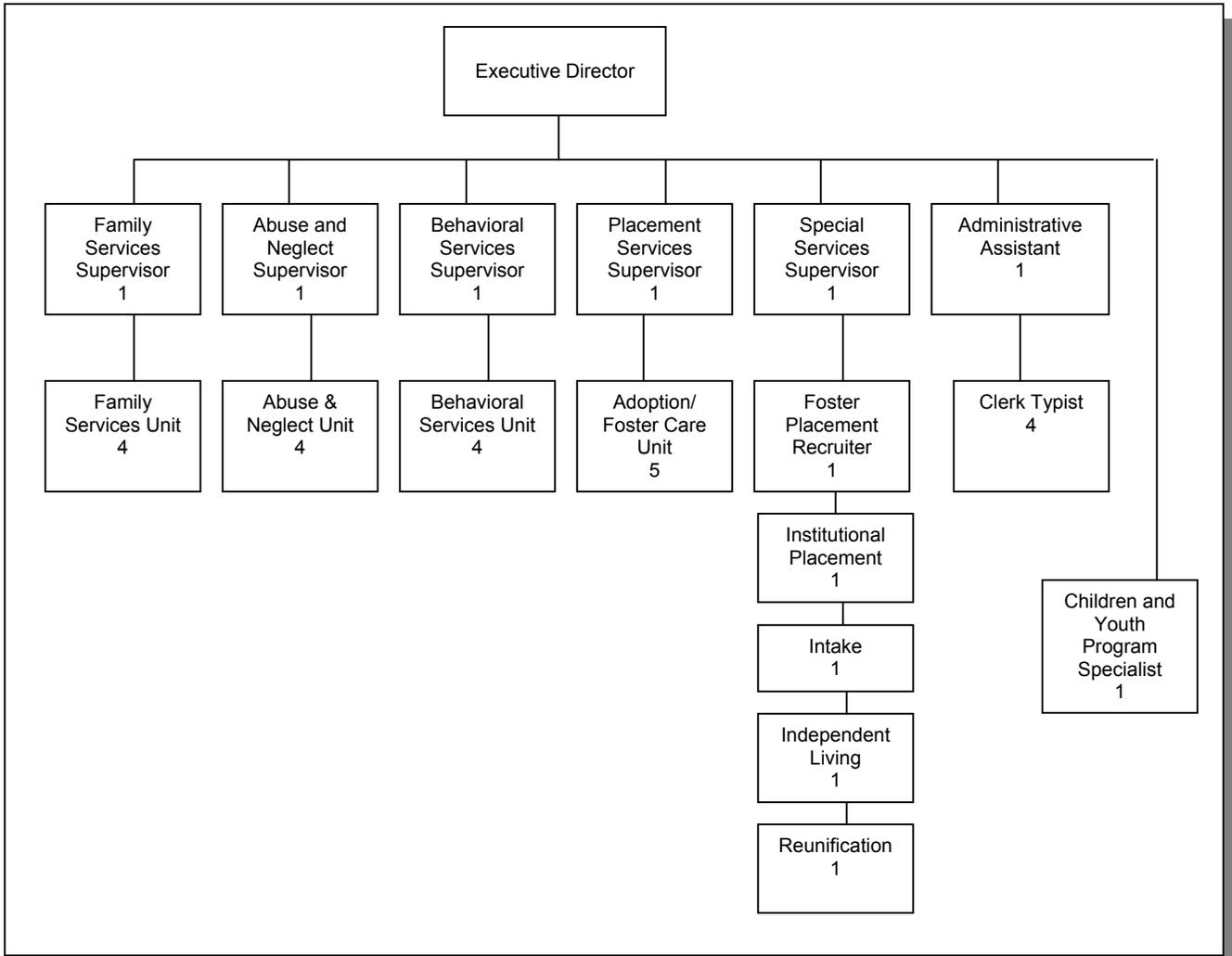
Pennsylvania's CPS is State-supervised, county-administered. The Butler County Children and Youth Agency is divided into six organizational units. The Abuse and Neglect Unit is responsible for investigation of all child abuse and neglect cases; the Family Services Unit is responsible for on-going in-home services; the Behavioral Services Unit is responsible for cases dealing with teens; the Placement Services Unit handles cases involving children in placement, including Foster Care and Adoption; the Special Services Unit includes a foster placement recruiter, an institutional placement worker, a call screener, an independent living worker, and a reunification worker. The Administration Unit is responsible for all clerical functions.

Exhibit 3.1, Butler County, Child Protective Services Division, Organizational Structure, depicts graphically the six organizational units.

REFORM EFFORTS

Butler County made a number of practice and staffing changes to the child protective services system that are designed to improve responsiveness to child and family service needs. The county also established a Community Service Review Team to develop and modify procedures and protocols. This team meets on a regular basis to identify needed changes.

**Exhibit 3.1
Butler County, Child Protective Services Division,
Organizational Structure**



Background of Reform Efforts

A key problem that reform efforts were designed to address was calls inappropriately assigned to investigators. Consequently, referrals for investigation and services were inconsistent. To address this problem, dedicated staff were assigned to this function. A Community Service Review Team was also established to review open cases for appropriateness of the decisions made.

Objectives

The key objectives of the reform efforts were to:

- Improve responsiveness through staff specialization. For example, all sexual abuse is handled by a dedicated sexual abuse investigator and all intakes are handled by an dedicated intake worker;

- Expedite and improve services, procedures, and protocols. A Community Service Review Team Was comprised of the District Attorney, police, service providers, and physicians was developed. The team designed the initial procedures and protocols; and
- Better meet the best interests of the child. Two part-time attorneys were hired to serve as Guardians Ad Litem.

Practice Components

More than one change was necessary to meet key objectives of the reform effort. Significant components of the reform are described below.

Separate Screening Function

A separate screening function was created to focus solely on intake. It is organizationally located in a separate Special Services Unit.

Dedicated Sexual Abuse Investigator

Due to the unique aspects of sexual abuse, a sexual abuse investigator position was created. All sexual abuse cases are assigned and handled by the specialized CPS worker. The worker has received specialized training, such as forensic interviewing techniques, to better handle these cases.

Community Service Review Team

A Community Service Review Team was created under the existing Multi-Disciplinary and Child Death Review Teams with the purpose to work with ongoing cases. The Community Service Review Team reviews and makes changes to procedures and protocols, which are used by the joint police and CPS multidisciplinary team.

Joint Police and CPS Investigations

The procedures and protocols establishing and governing joint police and CPS investigations were developed in response to Section 6365 (c) of the Child Protective Services Law (CPSL). The county agency and the District Attorney are required to develop a protocol for convening investigative teams in cases of alleged child abuse as described in section 6340 (a)(9) and (10) of the legislation (relating to release of information in confidential reports.) The county protocol must include standards and procedures to be used in receiving and referring reports, coordinating investigations of reported cases of child abuse, and sharing the information obtained as a result of any interview. The protocol must also incorporate other standards and procedures to avoid duplication of fact-finding efforts and interviews to minimize the trauma to the child.

The District Attorney is responsible for convening an investigative team. The investigative team must include those individuals and agencies responsible for investigating the abuse or providing services to the child and must at least include a health care provider, county caseworker and law enforcement officer. The protocol developed for the multidisciplinary teams is designed to:

- Meet the child’s need for safety and protection by reducing trauma;
- Ensure that all needs of the child abuse victim are met through comprehensive coordinated services by reducing duplication of services;

- Ensure that all disciplines are focused on the client’s well being, while meeting and maintaining respect for the needs of each individual agency’s philosophies and mandates;
- Expedite the investigation and prosecution process and increase successful prosecution of offenders by conducting joint interviews and improving the evidence collection process;
- Provide a system of case tracking, which assures the provision of needed services to the child victim and nonoffending family members and accountability of convicted and alleged perpetrators;
- Establish a process providing for the continuity of core team members over time;
- Share team member expertise with fellow team members, community leaders, mandated reporters, and the community;
- Ensure regular continuing education opportunities for core team members;
- Provide for ongoing assessment of community needs with a commitment to expansion of services as needed; and
- Regularly evaluate the team’s performance and implement ways to improve performance.

Hiring Guardians Ad Litem

The county hired two attorneys part time, as Guardians Ad Litem, to work as advocates for the best interest of the child.

Results

Supervisors and workers believe that the reform efforts resulted in significant changes. The reported changes follow.

Separate Screening Function

Supervisors and workers reported that there is more consistency in the intake function, which is positive for the community. In addition, the dedicated intake worker enables the investigator to focus on the investigation rather than determining whether or not the case should be investigated. Staff members also felt that the dedicated intake worker is better able to understand what investigations are underway and tie calls together for a consistent response. Supervisors and workers felt that the dedicated intake worker also reduced inappropriate investigations.

Dedicated Sexual Abuse Investigator

Staff members stated that specialization has been critical because of the intricacies of sexual abuse cases. The District Attorney reported that specialization in the area of abuse has been a great benefit in court. Investigators often came under heavy scrutiny on the stand, and having a dedicated sexual abuse investigator made it easier to defend the investigative techniques and strategies. This investigator also works as a member of the joint police and CPS investigative team.

Community Service Review Team

The Community Service Review Team is comprised of approximately 25 people and includes service providers, school personnel, physicians, Guardians Ad Litem, and others. Staff members have support from the Guardians Ad Litem, who can offer legal advice on procedural issues or

² County of Butler Guidelines for Investigative Team Intervention in Cases of Child Abuse. Butler County Pennsylvania Children and Youth Agency, p. 2.

historical precedence to assist the staff when they need to make difficult decisions. The team meets monthly and supervisors decide which cases should be presented for discussion. Usually the cases presented are the most problematic. This team complements other teams, such as the Multidisciplinary Team, which reviews abuse investigations, and the Child Death Review Team, which is convened when a child dies from possible abuse or neglect.

Joint Police and CPS Investigations

Workers indicated that new protocols make it clear that CPS will take the lead in conducting investigations with the child and that the police will take the lead in investigating the perpetrator. The specialized sexual abuse investigator also mentioned that the relationships have grown to the point that they have no trouble switching roles on occasion, when the circumstances dictate.

Hiring Guardians Ad Litem

In the past, attorneys would be appointed on a case-by-case basis to act as Guardians Ad Litem and would often not see the child until it was time to be in court. The county felt that the children were not being adequately served and hired two part-time attorneys. The Guardians Ad Litem act in the best interest of the child, not necessarily pursuing what the child wants. With the changes, the Guardians Ad Litem meet the children for whom they are advocating and better understand the circumstances of their situation. Both workers and Guardians Ad Litem felt that the new situation is working well and is beneficial to the children being served by the agency. The new relationship means that the agency worker and Guardians Ad Litem meet on a regular basis to discuss their cases and, although they do not always agree on what should be recommended in court, they are developing a trusting relationship.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The county plans to continue to implement and maintain the reforms that have been initiated.

Conditions that Sustain Reform

The following section briefly describes factors that have played an important role in the agency's ability to sustain its reform efforts.

Development of Partnerships

The addition of the Community Services Review Team, development of the protocols and procedures for joint police and CPS investigations, and the hiring of permanent Guardians Ad Litem have furthered the development of partnerships among service providers, law enforcement, and the legal community. Dedicated staff for intake and sexual abuse investigations has also helped to forge stronger bonds with the community and the families who are being served. The intent is to continue to build on these partnerships.

Increased Staff Morale

Prior to the implementation of the changes outlined in this report, staff morale and retention was a significant problem. With turnover high and morale low, service delivery suffered. Since reform efforts have provided staff with more support, staff morale has improved and staff turnover has declined substantially. Staff reported that they enjoy their work and are staying on

the job. This has resulted in a greater continuity of personnel, which translates into better continuity of care for the clients of the agency.

Training

Training for CPS investigators has been on-going, with specialized training for sexual abuse investigation. Joint training with local and State police has been instituted. As a result of recent change, the Child Welfare Educational Leadership program pays for staff to go back to school for a M.S.W. degree and pays for the agency to hire a temporary worker so that the agency will not be adversely affected by the workers' absence.

Future Plans

The agency intends to continue with the efforts that are already underway, particularly in the area of staff specialization. Whenever possible and appropriate, staff will be provided opportunities to acquire specialized skill sets to better serve the unique needs of their clients. The agency is also trying to provide dedicated staff to the review of practice standards. This will help the agency in its efforts to be proactive.

Pennsylvania has a unique funding structure for child welfare services. Funding is blended with Juvenile Justice services to cover both agencies. Although both agencies prepared their budgets for the coming year, circumstances within Juvenile Justice could create problems within Child Welfare. If, for example, in a small county there was a dramatic increase in delinquency (this could mean two or three secure care placements, when only one was budgeted) the funds must come from the existing funding, i.e. the child welfare system would have funds diverted to juvenile justice. The agency will continue to work toward making the funding mechanism more workable.

SUMMARY

Butler County Children and Youth Agency had high turnover rates, low morale, and poor service delivery during the recent past. Practice, staffing, and procedural reforms have significantly improved morale and agency functioning. In addition, partnerships have been established with the local and State police, District Attorney's office, Guardians Ad Litem, and service providers.